

Fishing for Salmon — It's Like Catching a Semi-truck

Depending on the size of a particular year's salmon run, the Idaho Fish and Game Commission may open a fishing season on salmon, creating a spectacular angling opportunity for anglers in the Inland Northwest.

In 2000 and 2001, a number of favorable conditions converged to produce the largest salmon runs in Idaho in more than 25 years. Many of the fish were of hatchery origin, and provided some of the best salmon fishing in Idaho in years.

In 2001, the peak season, the Idaho Fish and Game Commission opened the most liberal salmon-fishing season in years, allowing people to catch up to four fish a day, and 40 for the season on four rivers in Idaho. That brought anglers from Washington, Montana, Utah and elsewhere to fish the Clearwater River, Salmon River, Little Salmon and the Hells Canyon reach of the Snake River to catch the mighty chinook, perhaps the most prized game fish in the Pacific Northwest.

Thane Barrie, a die-hard Boise angler, took full advantage of the rare chinook season. "Oh, it was phenomenal," he says. "We had one day where we hooked 51 fish on the Little Salmon River and the Salmon River." Barrie says he would have caught his limit, but he ran out of room in his freezer.

Anglers use a wide variety of techniques for catching salmon. For starters, a heavy-weight rod and reel should be used with 15- to 20-pound test line. Depending on preference, anglers can use lures, plugs or bait to catch salmon. The fish are not actively feeding as they make their way upstream, so whatever the lure, it must be presented in deep water where the fish are holding, literally next to their nose. When a salmon strikes, the angler will most certainly take notice. It may seem like the line is snagged on a log for a moment, and then when the fish takes off, hold on tight and keep the rod tip up - get ready for a wild ride.

When a big chinook takes your line, look out, it's "like trying to catch a Mack truck," Mitch Sanchotena, a veteran salmon fishing guide says.

Be sure that your reel's drag is set properly, so you can let out enough line for the fish to run until it begins to tire and you can reel it in close to shore. A large net is essential.

In years like 2000 and 2001, when there is a large surplus of fish to catch, the Fish and Game Commission opened enough sections of water that salmon anglers had plenty of elbow room on the Salmon River and the Snake River. But inevitably, the most anglers will cram the banks of the Little Salmon, between the Salmon River confluence and Rapid River, where scores of hatchery fish climb up the narrow stream toward Rapid River Hatchery.

Here, it's so crowded on the river bank that anglers almost have to synchronize the time when they cast so as not to snag another line. Be sure to exercise proper courtesy to your neighboring anglers at these times to prevent lines from getting tangled and tempers flaring.

Remember: *Salmon anglers must purchase a special permit during the salmon season.* After catching a fish, the angler should write down on the permit each hatchery fish harvested and kept for the dinner table.

Be sure to watch for Fish and Game news for the next salmon-fishing season and seize the chance to catch an Idaho chinook salmon - it's a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.